FOUNDED BY QUAID-I-AZAM MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAH

DAWN

Tuesday
January 20, 2026
Rajab 30, 1447

KARACHI

Rs 35.00
18 Pages
Vol. LXXX No. 20
Regd. No. SS-022

www.dawn.com

Grid issues behind costly power: Nepra

• Transmission system suffers from overloading, underutilisation • 116 of 192 transformers overloaded beyond 80pc capacity • Regulator urges fast-tracking projects, upgrading substations • Says up to 1,750MW of cheaper power frequently curtailed

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's national transmission system, one of the largest in the world, suffers from a damaging mix of overloading and underutilisation, creating operational constraints that undermine merit-based power supply and impose an unquantifiable financial burden on consumers and the national economy, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) has said.

In a detailed review of the national grid system, the regulator pointed out that the backbone of the transmission network — 500kV and 220kV lines — remained "mostly overloaded" at the close of FY2024-25. It said the National Grid Company (NGC) faced critical overloading in several sections of its 500kV and 220kV network, particularly during summer peak demand.

"Many grid stations and power transformers are operating beyond 80 per cent of their rated capacity, risking equipment failure, voltage instability and outages," it said. In FY25, out of 192 transformers across 68 grid stations, 116 were overloaded beyond 80pc, it added.

Providing a breakdown, Nepra said 30 of 47 transformers at the 500/220kV level were overloaded beyond 80pc. In addition, 86 of 145 transformers at the 220/132kV level were overloaded beyond the same threshold.

Regions with notable overloading included Hyderabad, Islamabad, Lahore and Multan, with persistent constraints at key grids like Gatti, New Multan, Sarfaraz Nagar, Muzaffargarh and Sheikhupura.

"These limitations have led to reliance on expensive generation in violation of economic merit order (EMO) and rising project costs due to delays," it said.

Ironically, most of these grid stations at Rawat, Sheikhupura, Gatti, Multan, Yousafwala, Jamshoro and Muzaffargarh have been in an overloaded condition since 2017-18 and onwards.

According to the review, these constraints have limited full power evacuation from the 1,300MW Sahiwal coal-fired plant, overreliance on Attock, Halmore, Sapphire and Liberty, limited transformation capacity

Continued on Page 11

What prompted US to abort Iran strikes?

• US, Israel, Gulf allies all were underprepared for retaliation • Regime remained resilient as security forces stay loyal • Backchannel pledged to 'stop the killing' offered exit ramp

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: The crisis in Iran, driven by economic collapse, soaring inflation and deep public anger, has underscored both the limits of external military intervention and the resilience of Tehran's clerical regime, analysts and former officials said.

US President Donald Trump publicly encouraged Iranian protesters, warning Tehran that it would face consequences if it "violently kills peaceful protesters".

But behind the scenes, Washington came close to — and then stepped back from — military action, exposing the operational, political and strategic constraints shaping US policy.

According to a detailed *Axios* investigation, senior military, political and diplomatic officials across Washington and the Middle East believed US strikes on Iran were imminent.

Preparations were real, officials stressed. US troops began evacuating from Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar and from the Navy's Fifth Fleet base in Bahrain, while Iran closed its airspace.

"It wasn't fake or a ruse," one US official told *Axios*. Yet by that afternoon, the moment passed. "It was really close," another official said. "The military was in a position to do something really fast,

Continued on Page 11

FIREFIGHTERS, rescue workers and volunteers wait on the ground as their colleagues search for the remains of those trapped inside the gutted Gul Plaza shopping mall.—Tahir Jamal / White Star

Grief gives way to anger amid search for Gul Plaza victims

• 21 people confirmed dead; several remains pulled from debris; some found in pieces • Police list 69 missing; whereabouts of 35 traced via technology • No arson evidence so far; short-circuit suspected • Sindh CM announces Rs10m per deceased, orders inquiry • NA told over 8,000 jobless after 1,200 shops destroyed

By Imtiaz Ali

KARACHI: The death toll from the Gul Plaza fire rose to 21 on Monday as rescuers recovered more bodies from the debris of the multi-storey shopping complex, while the Sindh government announced Rs10 million in compensation for each deceased person's family and senators criticised repeated failures in enforcing building regulations.

The blaze erupted late on Saturday night in the busy market and gutted the basement and ground-plus-three-storey structure, which housed nearly 1,200 shops spread over roughly 8,000 square yards.

Although firefighters brought the flames under control, smoke continued to billow from the wreckage as teams worked through the charred remains.

South DIG Syed Asad Raza told *Dawn* on Monday evening that around 23 body parts had been recovered from the debris so far.

CDA reviews fire safety in high-rise buildings after Karachi tragedy: Page 4

Predictable tragedy: Editorial on Page 6

'Furqan was always willing to put himself at risk to save others': Page 13

He said that police had compiled a list of 69 missing persons and that the whereabouts of 35 had been traced with the help of geo-fencing.

One more body was identified on Monday as Tanveer Ahmed Khan, 46, a salesman whose name had been included in the missing list. A resident of Korangi No. 4, he was identified through his CNIC, the DIG said, adding that DNA samples were also being collected to confirm identities.

Police Surgeon Dr Summaiya Syed told *Dawn* they had conducted post-mortem examinations of 10 bodies so far and that only one had been identified. "All bodies were unidentifiable fragmenting pieces," she said, adding that samples had been taken from 48 family members for DNA profiling

Continued on Page 5

In maiden speech, new opposition leader extends olive branch to govt

• Achakzai offers 'unconditional support' for parliamentary supremacy, seeks release of political prisoners • TTAP chief says situation can be improved in KP and Balochistan with equitable distribution of resources

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: In his maiden speech as the National Assembly opposition leader on Monday, Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai, who also heads the opposition alliance, extended an olive branch to the government and offered 'unconditional support' to empower parliament.

Speaking in the lower house of parliament, Mr Achakzai, who is representing the Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP), said they would sit together with the government on issues of national importance but demanded confidence-building measures to make this happen.

The PkMAP leader was supposed to deliver his speech on Tuesday, but he arrived in the house at the fag-end of the session, before the deputy speaker could adjourn the house till Tuesday morning.

Opposition alliance vows to eschew violence during Feb 8 demos: Page 13

Clad in his customary beige wool shawl, the opposition leader made a case for constitutional supremacy, saying he would even "kiss the hands" of the army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, if he served the Constitution.

The NA opposition leader said Pakistan could afford more protests and assured that the TTAP would support the government if it wanted to empower the house. He, however, said the

Continued on Page 5

PTI will attend JCP meetings after Imran's nod: Gohar

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The PTI will not attend meetings of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) without prior consultations with its incarcerated chief Imran Khan, said PTI interim chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan on Monday.

"The party will take a final decision whether or not to attend future meetings of the JCP after consultations with the PTI founder," said Barrister Gohar in a media interaction at the Supreme Court. The JCP was reconstituted again in light of the 27th Amendment, which was passed by parliament despite reservations by the opposition and civil society groups.

Earlier this month, the JCP met multiple times to confirm judges' appointments to high courts, but the PTI leaders, barristers Gohar and Ali Zafar, did not participate in these meetings.

When asked why the PTI skipped these meetings, Barrister Gohar explained that the status of the commission had

Continued on Page 5

ON OTHER PAGES

CAD swells to $1.2bn in first half

Pakistan posted a current account deficit (CAD) of $1.174 billion during the first half of the current fiscal year compared with a surplus of $957 million in the same period last year, the State Bank of Pakistan said on Monday. The government has projected a current account deficit of around $2.1bn, or within 0-1 per cent of GDP, for FY26, anticipating higher imports driven by economic growth. **Page 9**